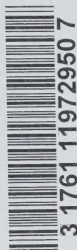


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October 16, 1980.

STATEMENT ON THE COMMISSION'S
PLAN OF WORK

I have to begin with a negative statement. We are not going to join in any way in speculation about what the Commission may recommend should be done to you or for you.

It is our job as Commissioners to question pre-conceptions, including our own. We will listen carefully to what people have to say to us, in the written and the spoken word, in most cases by their wish, but in some cases on our initiative. We will hold public hearings; how many, when and where will depend on what becomes appropriate in light of the briefs that are submitted in response to our advertised invitation. We will conduct our own investigations and research.

Only when all that is well advanced will we begin to formulate our conclusions and recommendations. Until then, all opinion is suspended.

That, of course, is why we have been uncommunicative with you and, in the matters that most interest you, are bound to remain so.

However, we hope it may be of some interest now to outline our plan of work -- or, if you like, our plan of attack on the newspaper problem.

We are providing to you a background statement on our terms of reference as we understand them. I won't reproduce it. From it, we deduce that, in order to make sound recommendations, we should start with a clear view of what precisely is a newspaper's responsibility to the public: what it should do for the community it serves and, through those people, what it should contribute to the intellectual, social, political and economic life of the country as a whole.

These are matters on which, we hope, a lot of people will offer their views; and as part of our research program, we intend to make sure that we get the contributions of distinguished journalists and ex-journalists, of publishers, and of some public persons and intellectuals.

Next we have to look at the legal framework within which the press operates or might operate; as part of that, we have to examine the great principle of the freedom of the press, its meaning and its place in the context of other rights and obligations.

Third, we have to look at the technology and the economics which have hitherto determined the way in which the press operates and discharges its public responsibilities. To that end, we will be conducting a fairly elaborate investigation of newspaper operations and finances. From it, we hope to develop conclusions about the reasons why control of the press has become as concentrated as it is, in the particular way it is. The extent to which we find that the reasons are compelling, or not, will obviously do much to determine the framing of our recommendations.

However, technology and economics change. In our society, they in some respects change quickly. We will have to try to assess the significance of the changes that are in prospect; and in that context, we must try to foresee what institutional arrangements might in the future best help to harness technological and economic forces to the service of the newspaper's public responsibilities.

As a sub-section of these inquiries, we have to look at the advertising which is so critical to newspaper finances, and assess the possible effects of future technological change on that business.

All of this must be done, of course, in context: the daily newspaper is an element in a changing compound of information and opinion media. While it is not our job to make recommendations about TV and radio and the rest, we have to look at them sufficiently for our recommendations to be realistically positioned within the whole world of information and communication.

Before we reach conclusions about concentration, about chains, about conglomerates, we will also have to examine the organization and management of newspaper operations.

I've said enough to illustrate what you know: it is a considerable task. I say that to enlist your sympathy not for the Commission as such but for the staff and consultants who will do the research and investigation. We have a firm deadline. Our report will be written by next July 1st. And though we are, I think, fast writers, adequate time for reflection makes it necessary that at least all the principal conclusions from the research must be available in March.

Meantime, the Commissioners will be conducting hearings. In order to do as much as possible in the time available, we won't necessarily sit always as a trinity. Some hearings may be conducted by one Commissioner.

As I said earlier, we must see what the public offers in briefs before we make detailed plans for hearings. We are working, however, on the expectation that we will be able to make a start in December. Appropriately, since it is the centre of the country as well as one of the communities directly affected by recent newspaper changes, we tentatively plan to begin in Winnipeg on December 8th. Not to slight the national capital, as the other most affected community, our second hearing will probably be here in Ottawa later in the same week.

These initial hearings will deal with viewpoints related chiefly to the particular community. We will plan to return to Ottawa later to hear submissions from national organizations of many kinds, including of course the newspaper chains.

All of this is pretty heavy stuff. We will do what we can to lighten it in ways that aid perceptions. As a beginning to that aspect of our endeavour, we propose to invite cartoonists to offer their graphic insights into the Commission's task as we are trying to describe it today. I rather quake as to what we may see, but perhaps it will provide a salutary example in the art of seeing ourselves as others see us. We will offer modest prizes for cartoons, and hope that the best of them, judged independently, will provide enlightening illustration for our report.

I do not need to say to you that we think this is an important inquiry. It will not be easy to find practical ways to assure and, if possible, improve the flow of information and comment to the public and, generally, the discharging of newspaper responsibilities. However, we wouldn't be here if we were afraid of difficult problems. We will try to do some good; with what success, you and others will have opinions about later. But please don't kid yourselves, or your readers, that you can guess now.

In that spirit, we are open to questions. We will be glad to answer those that are about methods. We will try to evade any that speculate about the conclusions and results of our work.

